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ABSTRACT

This study examined Norwegian seventh graders' English writing, investigating how close their writing in English was to their writing in Norwegian and how levels of performance in second language writing were linked to broader issues (curriculum guidelines, extensive reading, contact time with the target language, and teacher qualifications). Students each wrote a narrative based on a sequence of six pictures. Students wrote about three of the pictures in Norwegian and three in English. The two languages were compared on sentence type, subordination, and noun phrases. Students were able to translate their story grammar from first to second language writing. Most students' writing had not reached the same level of syntactic complexity in English as it had in Norwegian. Despite the fact that Norwegian and English are syntactically similar in regard to subordination and noun phrases, there was a discrepancy between the two languages in this respect. Results highlighted the potential to reach a level of early second language proficiency close to first language proficiency. For example, even though they wrote under time constraints, students produced almost as much English as Norwegian text. The writing of one in four students, in terms of syntactic complexity and idiomaticity, was comparable in the two languages. (Contains 22 references.) (SM)

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A comparison of early writing in Norwegian L1 and English L2

Paper at the 8th Nordic Conference on Bilingualism, Stockholm, 1-3 November 2001

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Stavanger University College

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A comparison of early writing in Norwegian L1 and English L2

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Introduction and aims

The aim of this paper is to discuss the writing in English of Norwegian seventh graders both on a micro and macro level. On a micro level the aim is to determine how close the pupils' writing in English is to that of their matrix language, Norwegian. On a macro level the aim is to discuss how the levels of performance in L2 writing may be linked to broader issues, such as curriculum guidelines, extensive reading, contact time with the target language and teacher qualifications.

A new national curriculum for schools (*L97*) was implemented in Norway in 1997. The new curriculum in English has been radical in two ways. Firstly, it has introduced English into the earliest grades of primary education, thus following a global trend of early learning in English (Rixon 2000a)[1]. Most countries introducing L2 English at an earlier level than previously, including Norway, have put their faith into the *earlier the better* hypothesis. Secondly, there has been a clear emphasis on the development of *early literacy*. A number of scholars conducting research into the growing field of emergent and early literacy have implicitly or explicitly adhered to the view that an early start to reading and writing will lead to a faster and deeper rate of literary growth (eg Cambourne 1983). Much of this research has been into early mother tongue literacy (eg Sulzby 1985, Goodman 1986, Teale 1986), but some has also looked into children's early contact with second language literacy. For instance, Cambourne's (1986) study of young children of non-English native background in Australian schools demonstrated how their writing skills were able to develop concurrently in two languages from an early age, dependent on factors such as favourable learning conditions, sufficient time, and teacher guidance and demonstration.

According to the new curriculum, Norwegian pupils are encouraged to encounter and experiment with the written English language as early as the first grade. By the time they reach the seventh grade, the grade immediately prior to lower secondary school, they are expected to read a rich variety of texts from different epochs and be inspired by these to

[1] Rixon defines early learners as children in the 6-11 age group. However, the term has also been used to include children in the pre-school age (3/4) up to and including the age of 12/13.

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compose their own texts. Literature-based language learning programmes have demonstrated clear benefits for language growth in general, and especially writing (eg Elley and Mangubhai 1983, Hafiz and Tudor 1989, Gradman and Hanania 1991). Moreover, the importance of reading at different levels of L2 development, both that of authentic texts and graded readers, is stressed by Day and Bamford (1998) in their comprehensive work on extensive L2 reading in the second language classroom.

Data and Method

The pupils involved in the study were 56 seventh graders from three schools in the Stavanger area[2]. In the spring of 2001, each pupil wrote a narrative during one 45 minute school lesson, inspired by a sequence of six pictures depicting a landslide onto a railway line and the way a group of children react to warn the approaching train of the imminent danger (from Heaton 1975). The pupils were instructed to write about the first three pictures in Norwegian and the last three pictures in English. For the purposes of this study, I have translated the Norwegian texts into English.

In addition to measuring the total production in each language, the two languages were compared from a syntactic point of view, focusing on three main areas:

- Sentence types
- Subordination
- Noun phrases

Sentence types

The analysis of sentence types measured the occurrence of simple, compound and complex sentences in the narratives. A sentence was in principle defined as a unit starting with a capital letter and ending in a terminal punctuation mark, but in cases of obvious *run-on* sentences (eg *Mary is sick she has gone to bed*), I used my judgment to impose sentence boundaries. A simple sentence was defined as one with one main clause. A compound sentence was defined as one with two or more main clauses coordinated by the conjunctions *and, but* or *or*. Finally, a complex sentence was defined as one with one or more main clauses in addition to one or more subordinate clauses, namely adverbial, relative or nominal clauses. A writer's ability to

[2] The schools are later referred to as SA (school one), SB (school two) and SC (school three).

use complex sentences is normally considered as a sign of syntactic maturity (see eg Hunt 1965).

Subordination

The analysis of subordination measured the occurrence of subordinate clauses within complex sentences. The categories of subordinate clauses included in the analysis conformed to the adverbial, relative and nominal categories outlined by Quirk et al. (1985:1047). Firstly, adverbial clauses were defined as clauses of time, place, purpose, reason, result, condition, similarity/comparison and concession. The syntactic realisation of adverbial clauses is in many ways similar in English and Norwegian. Secondly, relative clauses, considered by many to be an indicator of successful grammatical complexity in English (eg Wolfe-Quintero 1998), were defined as finite *which, who, that* or *zero* clauses. Norwegian relative clauses, in contrast, are less complex, being introduced through one relative pronoun, *som*, or *zero* pronoun. Finally, nominal clauses were defined as *that*- clauses, nominal relative clauses, *to*-infinitive clauses, and *ing*- clauses. Nominal clauses in Norwegian are in principle similar to English with the exception of nominal *ing*- clauses, which are normally expressed through infinitives in Norwegian.

Noun phrases

Finally, the occurrence of simple and complex noun phrases, regarded as a central unit of syntax by Quirk et al. (1985), was also measured. Noun phrases are syntactically similar in English and Norwegian. A simple noun phrase was defined as one with a noun used independently or together with a determiner. A complex noun phrase was defined as one with the head noun either premodified, for instance with an adjective, postmodified, eg with a relative clause, or both pre- and postmodified.

Holistic appraisal

By looking at some complete texts, an approach used by among others Skjelbred (1999), it was possible to add a qualitative dimension to the quantitative data. In addition to measuring their syntactic complexity, a number of texts were compared on the basis of criteria such as spelling, grammatical and morphological accuracy, and the ability to use typical narrative devices, such as dialogue.

Results

The length of the narratives

The total Norwegian and English narrative production, expressed as percentages of the overall production, is shown in Figure 1:

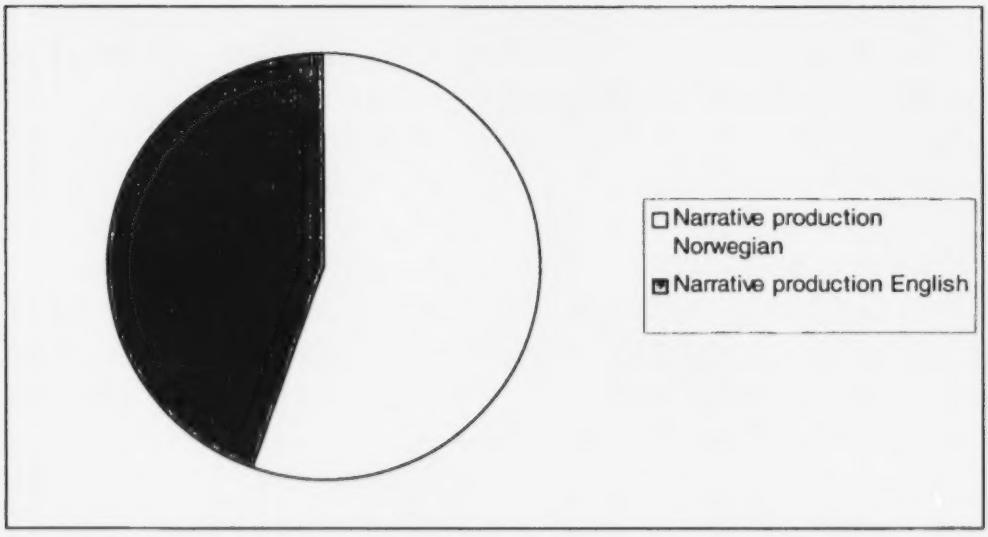

Figure 1: The total narrative production in Norwegian and English

Of the total production in both languages, Norwegian constituted 55.2 per cent and English 44.8 per cent. On average, pupils produced Norwegian texts of 84 words and English texts of 73 words. Although the general tendency was to write more in Norwegian than in English, every third pupil in fact produced a longer text in English than in their mother tongue. For others, however, writing in English appeared to be more demanding. Roughly one in six produced less than half in English of what they had written in Norwegian, and two pupils produced no English at all.

Sentence types

The distribution of simple, compound and complex sentences is shown in Figure 2:

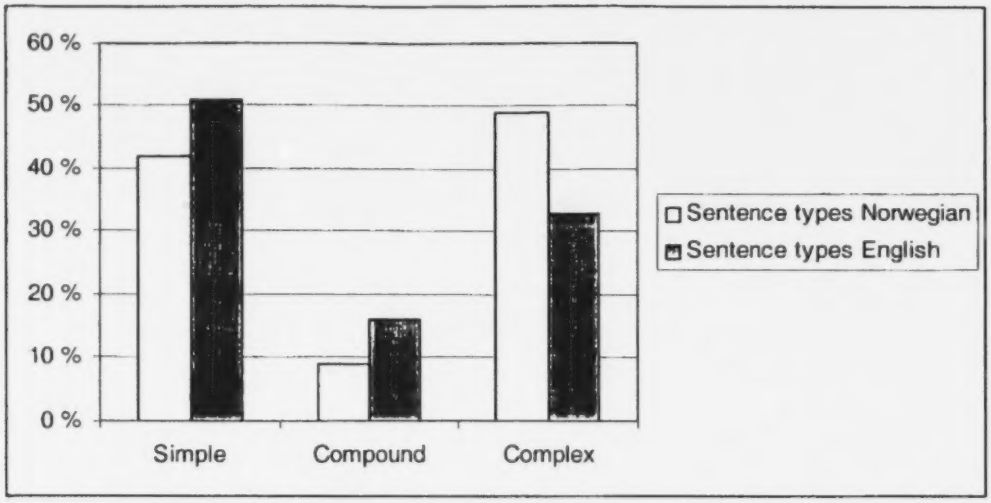

Figure 2: Distribution of sentence types as percentages of the total number of sentences

Although simple sentences were common in both languages, these were more frequent in English (51%) than in Norwegian (42%). Compound sentences were also more frequent in English than Norwegian, whereas there was a marked difference in the occurrence of complex sentences, 49 per cent in Norwegian compared to 33 per cent in English. As the use of complex sentences is generally regarded as a sign of syntactic maturity (Hunt 1965), the distribution of sentence types indicates that the pupils had reached a considerably higher level of maturity in Norwegian than in English in this respect. In their Norwegian texts, they used almost as many complex sentences as simple and compound sentences together.

Subordinate clauses

Figure 3 illustrates the distribution of adverbial, nominal and relative subordinate clauses in the pupils' narratives:

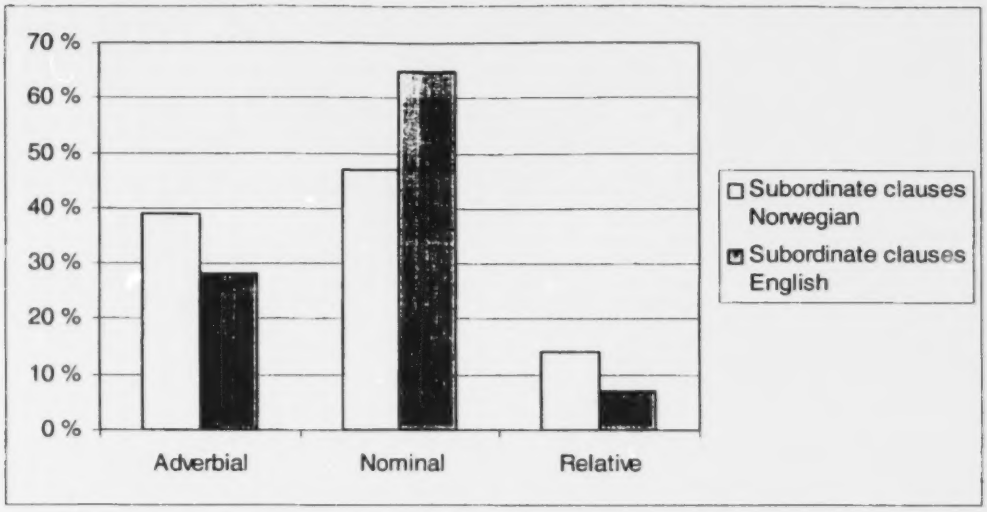

Figure 3: Distribution of subordinate clause types as percentages of the total number of subordinate clauses

The Norwegian texts accounted for a higher frequency of subordinate clauses than the English ones (0.63 compared to 0.41 per sentence). As for distribution of different clause types, adverbial and relative clauses were considerably more common in the pupils' Norwegian than in their English. In fact, the pupils used twice as many Norwegian relative clauses than English ones, as in [1]:

[1] The most enjoyable thing *they knew* was to look at all the trains *that sped past*.
(SA8 - Norwegian)[3]

Nominal clauses, however, especially *that* clauses and *to* infinitives, were in fact more frequently used in the English texts, as exemplified by [2]:

[2]...the man in the train looked at the tunnel and saw *that they had right*. [SC13 - English]

Fewer relative clauses in English may be explained by the fact that their realisation is more complex than in Norwegian, since English relative clauses are introduced by different relative pronouns distinguishing personal and non-personal antecedents. However, it appeared that the pupils found it relatively easy to compose *that* nominal clauses and *to* infinitive clauses in English, apparently because of the syntactic similarity these clauses hold to Norwegian.

[3] This denotes Norwegian text 8 in school one.

Noun phrases

Figure 4 shows the ratio of simple to complex noun phrases in the pupils' narratives:

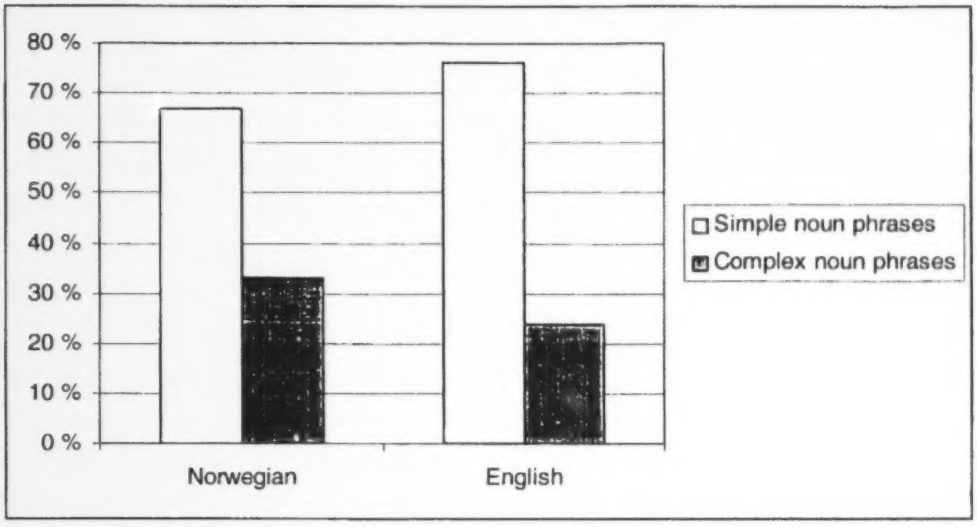

Figure 4: The distribution of simple and complex noun phrases as percentages of the total number of noun phrases

Although the mean number of noun phrases per sentence was almost identical in the two languages (1.8 in Norwegian compared to 1.9 in English), the pupils displayed a greater degree of sophistication in the realisation of their Norwegian noun phrases than they did in their English. In the Norwegian texts, every third noun phrase was complex, whereas the ratio of complex to simple in the English texts was one to four.

The fact that the pupils produced fewer complex noun phrases in English than in Norwegian was probably due to two factors. Firstly, vocabulary limitations may have prevented them from using premodifiers, such as adjectives and nouns, to the same extent in English as in Norwegian. Secondly, the pupils seemed to lack the syntactic maturity to postmodify to any great extent, especially in English. The occurrence of postmodifying prepositional phrases and relative clauses was infrequent in the English texts, while non-finite *–ing* and *–ed* clauses hardly occurred at all.

An overview of the percentages of pre- and postmodification that occurred within the noun phrases is provided in Figure 5:

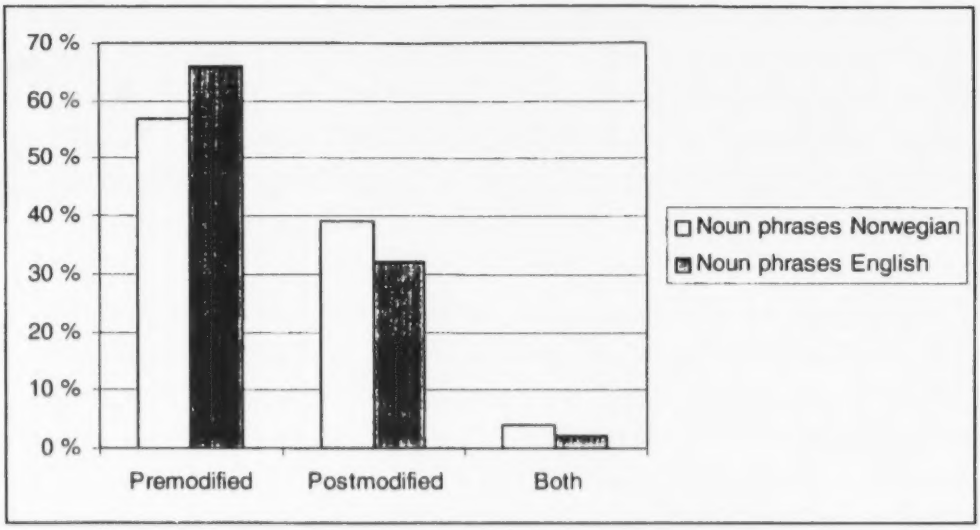

Figure 5: Types of noun phrase modification as percentages of the total number of noun phrases

Premodification was the most common type of noun phrase modification in both languages. In the English texts, a limited number of nouns used as premodifiers, such as *railway* line, *railway* station and *signal* box, accounted for a high percentage of the total number of premodifiers. However, since the pupils were actually provided with *railway line* and *signal box* as starting vocabulary, it is reasonable to conclude that they displayed a greater *variety* of premodification in their Norwegian texts, especially through adjectives:

[3] They waved goodbye, but just at that moment a *terrible* storm started.
(SA1 - Norwegian)

[4] They ran along the *railway* line...(SA13 - English)

Relative clauses and prepositional phrases, illustrated in [5] and [6], accounted for the majority of noun phrase postmodifiers in both languages, with postmodification being more frequent in Norwegian (39%) than in English (32%):

[5] "We must warn the train", says Åsulf *who is the most intelligent among them.*
(SC5 - Norwegian)

[6] It drived straight into the pile *of rocks.* (SC20 - English)

Complex noun phrases that were both pre- and postmodified were rare in both languages and, although more frequent in Norwegian than in English, the difference was not marked.

A holistic appraisal of individual narratives

In general, it appeared that the pupils were able to transfer their 'story grammar' from their first to second language writing. The narrative devices that they employed in their Norwegian texts, such as appropriate openings, setting the scene, introducing characters, developing the plot and using dialogue were smoothly adapted to the English texts. For instance, the pupils were generally able to round off their texts in English with appropriate endings, and used dialogue in English as much as in Norwegian. Differences that appeared between the two languages were largely attributable to differences in syntactic complexity, lexical complexity, and orthographic, morphological and grammatical accuracy.

When considering the narratives from a holistic point of view, one may divide the pupils into three main groups. Pupils in the first group, comprising 23 per cent of the total number, produced English that was similar to their Norwegian in terms of syntactic and lexical complexity, but which nevertheless contained a greater number of formal errors (represented by one pupil in [7]).

[7]

Norwegian translated into English

Tom, Bo, and Sandra lean on the fence. They wave goodbye to aunt Sally. They look forward to next Friday because she will then be visiting again.

It starts to rain, so they run inside to father, who is making a cup of cocoa.

Friday at last says Bo while he and the others go out to the fence. But look at the tunnel, screams Sandra, there has been a landslide here! Yes, and when aunt Sally comes to us from Sweden she is going to crash!!!

English

We have to warn the railway-station, sad Bo. But what if we are to laight? Come sad Sandra we'll run to the railway station and tell them about the Tunnel. I'll come with you sad Eric (the father).

I can see the train now. We wont make it to the railway station. I'll stop the train you go and warn the director, and tell him that the train from Sweden will crasj if it doesn't stop now!

The children ran up to the man that controls the signal box and told him about the tunnel and then they saw that ther father had stopt the train and the director put the "stop" signal on his signal box just in case. The next day they were given a cake and some flowers from the traindriver and the "signalman" as a thanks. THE END. (SA9)

Although superficial in its presentation of the characters and context, suspense is built up in the Norwegian text as one of the characters, aunt Sally, is in imminent danger if the train is not warned of the landslide onto the railway lines. The writer's 'story grammar' is transferred smoothly and coherently from the Norwegian to the English text. The drama unfolds with the danger being averted and the children and their father receiving a reward for their efforts.

The two texts have other parallel features. Firstly, the degree of subordination used in both languages is similar. The Norwegian text contains adverbial clauses of reason and time, whereas the English one contains an adverbial clause of condition (*the train from Sweden will crasj if it doesn't stop now!*). Relative clauses are used in both the Norwegian (*...father, who is making a cup of cocoa.*) and in the English (*...the man that controls the signal box...*).

Secondly, the writer uses predominantly simple noun phrases in both texts (*the tunnel* [N], *the children* [E]. In addition, the language in the English text is idiomatic (*We wont make it to the railway station, But what if we are to laight?),* as well as containing an example of a rare occurrence in any of the texts in the corpus – the passive construction *they were given a cake and some flowers from the traindriver.* On the minus side, a number of spelling and morphological errors occur in the English text.

The second group, and the largest (64% of the total number), were those writers whose English was on the whole understandable and coherent, but which lacked much of the syntactic and lexical variation of their Norwegian, in addition to a high frequency of formal errors, and 'Norwegianisms' (represented by one pupil in [8]).

[8]

Norwegian translated into English

The Olsen family wave goodbye to the train. Their oldest son was going to travel to Oslo. He was going to fetch mother there. Father, Line and Truls wave. They are very much looking forward to mother coming home. He said he would buy a doll for Line, and a fire engine for Truls. Mother had been in Paris. She had taken a plane to Oslo where Peter was going to meet her. They watch the train disappear into the tunnel.

It starts to rain. They run inside the house. They enjoy themselves. Father finds some cakes and soft drinks. Line and Truls carry some of it, since they will have some when mother comes home.

It has now stopped raining. They go outside. There are now only 15 minutes till mother arrives home. They walk over the tunnel. Then father notices that there has been a landslide. They have to hurry, and warn people that there has been a landslide. So they must get the train to stop.

English

Line and Truls run to the signal box. Dady hoped thei wil stopet det train.

Now comes the train and Dady vinker to the train. Line and Truls said to the man ho sturer the signal box. The man closed the Railway line and now stoppet the train and naw are many saived.

If dei not had seen the landslide will the train crach and many people vil daid. There was ca 1000 people in the train. The family Olsen go in to ther hose and drunk tea.
Line and Truls get their doll from Momy.
The End (SB4)

The Norwegian text contains a number of complex sentences, most of which include a nominal clause (eg *Then father notices that there has been a landslide)*, in addition to one relative clause which postmodifies Oslo (*where Peter was going to meet her*), and one adverbial clause of reason (*since they will have some when mother comes home*). Most of the noun phrases are simple (*the train, father, the tunnel*), but there are also some complex ones (*the Olsen family, their oldest son*).

The English text, in contrast, has only three complex sentences, one containing a nominal clause (*Dady hoped thei wil stopet det train*), one a relative clause (*the man ho sturer the signal box*) and one an incorrectly formulated adverbial clause of condition (*If dei not had seen the landslide will the train crach and many people vil daid*).

As with the Norwegian text, most of the noun phrases are simple (*Truls, the landslide)*, while a few are complex (*the family Olsen*). The text is otherwise characterised by a number of errors of an orthographic (*naw, ho, ther hose*), morphological (*stopet*) and lexical (the use of Norwegian *sturer, vinker*) nature. In addition, Norwegian word order is used on more than one occasion, for instance when inverting the subject and verb in *'...and now are many saved'*.

The third and final group, comprising 13 per cent of the total number, were those writers whose English was clearly inferior to their Norwegian in terms of syntactic and lexical complexity, formal errors, 'Norwegianisms' and the ability to convey meaning in an understandable way (represented by one pupil in [9]).

[9]

Norwegian translated into English

Once upon a time three children stood and looked at the railway line. Suddenly a train came out of the tunnel at full speed but all the children jumped onto the fence and waved to the train in the hope that someone would see them waving. But then it started raining heavily. Then they started to run homewards but when they came in each of them looked as wet as a drowned cat. Then their mother made them hot chocolate so that they could get warm again. They did get warm at least when they had put on a woollen jumper and woollen socks.

Next morning it was dry and there was sun and it was nice and warm. The three brothers went out and positioned themselves on the bridge and looked for a train they could wave to. But none came just then. When they were about to go in again they heard tut-tut. Then they ran back to the bridge and started waving. This time there was a man and a woman who waved back. Jippi said the children.

English

And they hav eate midag so do the children ask hes father about he wanted to be with them out and play. The father say jes off kors I kan. And the children run of to the rayl way line and the father say don't do thet its danger and the father følge after dem but he kudent rits dem.

There com a trein. Wats opp but the children wodent høre at him so dos the train bråbremste and di made it yost inn hagen and the children dos not ben hørt.
And the train føreren gad are you people crasy. You cod bin cild. You had rilflaks I got to say becus I dident saw you inn the...(SC4)

The majority of sentences in the Norwegian text are complex, subordinating through nominal (*then it started raining heavily*), relative (*there was a man and a woman who waved back*) and various adverbial clauses (*so that they could get warm again*). Moreover, a number of the noun phrases are complex (*a drowned cat, a woollen jumper, a train they could wave to*). The writer does not appear to have noticeable problems in orthography, grammatical accuracy or appropriate lexis.

In contrast, the English text contains only two complex sentences, the first and last, which include the only two subordinate clauses in the text. The first sentence contains the incorrectly expressed nominal clause *(...about he wanted to be with them out and play)*, which the writer has translated word for word from the Norwegian equivalent. The last sentence contains the inaccurately expressed adverbial clause of reason (*...becus I dident saw you inn the.*). The only complex noun phrases are *the rayl way line* and *the train føreren*. In addition, the general level of accuracy is extremely poor. There are numerous orthographic (*di, yost*), morphological (*hav eate)*, lexical (*hagen, midag*) and grammatical errors (*the children dos not ben hørt*). The writer is strongly influenced, in a negative sense, by transfer from his/her first language. To someone without a knowledge of a Scandinavian language, parts of this text would have been difficult to comprehend.

Discussion

This study has shown that the writing of the majority of the seventh graders had not reached the same level of syntactic complexity in English as it had in Norwegian. In spite of the fact that Norwegian and English are syntactically similar in the areas focused upon in this study, namely subordination and noun phrases, there was a noticeable discrepancy between the two languages in this respect. On the whole, the Norwegian texts contained a greater number of complex sentences, relative and adverbial clauses, and complex noun phrases than their English counterparts. In addition, the pupils' English was noticeably inferior to their Norwegian in other areas, such as lexical variety and morphological and grammatical accuracy.

At the same time, this study has shown that a *potential* exists to reach a level of early L2 proficiency that is close to the level of L1. Firstly, even though they wrote under the pressure of time constraints, the pupils involved produced almost as much text in English as they did in Norwegian. Even more significant is the fact that the writing of almost one in four of the pupils, in terms of its syntactic complexity and idiomaticity, was comparable in the two languages (see [7]). Although one may argue, therefore, that the potential for early biliteracy exists, understanding how this potential may be realised is a complex issue. There is evidence, for instance, that the development of L2 writing is influenced as much by factors outside the classroom as in inside. Purves (1992), in his comprehensive international study of written composition, concluded that of all the factors influencing writing development, *the home environment* was the most significant. Although one should not doubt the validity of this claim, those involved in the teaching of languages need to continuously strive towards

creating conditions that are optimally conducive to the promotion of language skills *in the classroom*. That is their job as professionals.

Many would argue that the new curriculum in English has laid the foundations for the promotion of early literacy in English. However, a curriculum introducing English at an early age and outlining ambitious literacy targets for young learners is in itself no guarantee of success. The age factor alone, as argued by Rixon (2000b:2), is not enough to bring about successful learning. Success is also dependent on the conditions and factors surrounding *the way* an early language programme is implemented. So what other factors within an educational context are likely to have a significant bearing on the level of second language literacy?

One is time. Although English has been introduced into the earliest grades of primary education in Norway, the number of contact hours pupils have with English is only a fraction of what they have in Norwegian, especially during the impressionable first four years, as illustrated in Table 1:

Table 1: Average number of lessons per week in grades 1 – 7.

Language	**Grades 1-4**	**Grades 5-7**
Norwegian	6 lessons a week	5 lessons a week
English	0.6 lessons a week	2.5 lessons a week

Pupils are exposed to only 95 lessons of English in total from the first to the fourth grades, a period when the opportunity for language acquisition is optimal. This is one tenth of their exposure to Norwegian. The picture improves from grades four to seven, where the number of lessons in English is increased to half the number in Norwegian, an average of two and a half lessons a week in English compared to five lessons a week in Norwegian. The discrepancy is intensified, however, when one considers that pupils are expected to develop both their *oral* and *written* skills simultaneously during the few lessons they have in English from grades one to seven. In their study of early literacy, Cambourne and Turbill (1987:67) stressed that development in reading and writing can only be expected *if sufficient time is allocated for this purpose*. To expect pupils to reach a high level of L2 literacy is therefore unrealistic when so little time is made available.

In contrast to the foreign language teacher, the mother tongue teacher can concentrate on enhancing literacy skills, since the ability to communicate orally is taken for granted in one's native language. It requires considerable skill on the part of the foreign language teacher

to coordinate the growth of oral and written skills *simultaneously* among early learners, and to ensure that these skills interact naturally and meaningfully, complementing and reinforcing each other in a total language-learning programme. For instance, the ability to link individual and class reading to written and oral activities requires more than simply a basic understanding of foreign language methodology. It requires insight into methodological principles of L2 language teaching and writing pedagogy on a deep level.

This leads to what is arguably the most crucial factor determining the promotion of literacy standards in school, namely teacher competence. The notion of teacher competence needs to be elaborated here. To promote early literacy, I would argue that a teacher needs to:

- Be a good language model;
- Have insight into how young learners develop language;
- Know how to integrate reading and writing meaningfully into the total language learning programme;
- Be able to recognise linguistic problems in pupils' writing, eg first language interference, and have strategies to cope with these;
- Be able to use a range of strategies, including process writing and electronic aids, in the promotion of writing.

Unfortunately, the ambitious literacy targets in English set by the curriculum for the primary and intermediate levels do not correspond to the current level of teacher qualifications in Norway at these levels. In spite of its relatively high status in schools, English paradoxically is not and has never been a compulsory subject in Norwegian teacher education. The situation has been exacerbated in recent years by progressively fewer trainee teachers choosing English as an optional subject in the course of their teacher education. The consequence is an alarming shortage of qualified teachers of English. According to figures published by Statistisk Sentralbyrå (2000), seven out of ten teachers in grades 1-4, and every second teacher in grades 5-7 who teach English, have no formal tertiary qualifications in the subject. These teachers teach primarily on the strength of a general teaching certificate which *formally* qualifies them to teach under the present system. As teachers of English, they have to rely primarily on the English they themselves learnt at upper secondary school. They have a twofold handicap of what is likely to be an unacceptably low level of target-language proficiency, on the one hand, and little or no training in the methodology of teaching a foreign

language, on the other. In a previous study of competence in the teaching of writing (Drew 1998), I argued that success in the teaching of writing depends on teachers' command of the written language and the methodology they employ to teach it. This was a view corroborated by Rixon (2000b:3), who in her international study of early learners in English, emphasised the teacher's own command of the language as one of the essential factors in successful learning, since this would affect both the teacher as a model of language and the type of methodology adopted. According to Rixon, countries with the most positive experiences of early learners are those which have made a considerable and long-standing investment into teacher preparation. Norway has not made such an investment.

Conclusion

This study has compared the quality of Norwegian seventh graders' writing in English and Norwegian and used the findings to comment on the educational system providing the premises for written L2 production. One may argue that for 12/13-year-olds to produce L2 writing that is close in quality to that of their L1, the following prerequisites are necessary within an educational context:

- An early start to language learning and literacy
- Extensive target-language reading
- The provision of sufficient contact time
- High level teacher competence

At present, there is an obvious mismatch in the Norwegian educational system between a curriculum which introduces foreign language learning to six-year-olds and emphasises extensive reading, on the one hand, and insufficient contact time and a generally low level of teacher competence, on the other hand. If the standard of literacy in English is to be raised among Norwegian early learners, it is essential that contact time is increased and teacher competence enhanced. So far there are no signals that contact time in English will be increased. However, at the time of writing there are signals that a reform in teacher training is imminent, one that either enables teachers to specialise in core subjects, to specialise at a given level – primary, intermediate or lower secondary – or both.

Monitoring children's progress in writing provides insight into the efficacy of an L2 programme. Since a relatively small sample of data was used in this study, further research is

necessary, for instance combining a larger corpus of texts with classroom observation, pupil and teacher questionnaires, or both. It would also be interesting to analyse the writing of children both younger and older than those in the present study. It may further be worth considering alternative approaches to the actual writing task used in future comparative experiments, simply to determine whether the task itself has any bearing on the results. One possibility is to compare writing produced as a result of a process approach, rather than a product approach, to ascertain if foreign language writing may have as much or more to gain from process writing as mother tongue writing does. In a similar vein, one could compare products resulting from a process approach with non-process products. A further possibility is for pupils to reverse the order of languages, so that they write first in English and then in Norwegian during a similar experiment. Moreover, one could compare whole texts that pupils write first in one language and then in the other. Finally, as Norway is just one of many countries around the world where English is taught to early learners, it would be interesting to compare the level of writing proficiency in English of Norwegian children with those of different native language backgrounds.

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